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AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 29876

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (PARA NBR 1 LINE 5
WATCHING VICE TOUCHING)

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, FR, PINT

SUBJECT: FRENCH INTERNAL POLITICAL SCENE -- AUGUST AND
SEPTEMBER 1976

SUMMARY: JACQUES CHIRAC -- THAT STACCATO NAME HAS BEEN ON EVERYONE'S LIPS FOR THE PAST MONTH, AS PEOPLE WONDERED WHAT HE WAS GOING TO PULL OUT OF HIS HAT NEXT. WITH EACH RABBIT SOMEONE ELSE FOUND NEW CAUSE TO WORRY. AS THE BARRE GOVERNMENT SETTLED SLOWLY INTO PLACE, GISCARD D'ESTAING GAVE THE UNFORTUNATE IMPRESSION OF HAVING NO FRIENDS LEFT BUT HIS OWN INDEPENDENT REPUBLICAN PARTY, AND NOT EVEN ALL OF THEM. THE BARRE PLAN HAS BEEN ACCEPTED, ALBEIT WITH CERTAIN RESERVATIONS, BY THE MAJORITY, BUT NEARLY EVERY COMMENTATOR HAS QUALIFIED HIS REMARKS ON ONE OR MORE POINTS, AND THE OPPOSITION HAS BEEN PREDICTABLY HOSTILE. AS THE MAJORITY PARTIES UNDERGO SOME OF THEIR DEEPEST SOUL-SEARCHING SINCE THE MAY 1974 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, THE LEFT GOT NO HEADLINES AT ALL. EXCEPT FOR THOSE CONCERNING PRIME MINISTER BARRE'S PUBLIC IMAGE, POLLS BROUGHT THEIR USUAL BAD NEWS TO THE MAJORITY. WHILE THE BROAD PROBLEM OF INVESTITURES FOR THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS HAS BEEN MORE OR LESS RESOLVED, INDIVIDUAL CASES REMAIN THAT FLARE-UP WITHIN BOTH THE MAJORITY AND THE OPPOSITION. THERE HAS BEEN THE USUAL SCANDAL OR TWO, TO DELIGHT READERS OF "MINUTE", AND AS USUAL ONE PARTY OR ANOTHER HAS BEEN QUICK TO EXPLOIT THEM. THERE MUST HAVE BEEN MORE THAN ONE FRENCHMAN WHO, AT THE END OF SEPTEMBER, SYMPATHIZED WITH TAYLOR'S WORDS:

WHEN QUACKS WITH PILLS POLITICAL WOULD DOPE US,
WHEN POLITICS ABSORBS THE LIVELONG DAY,
I LIKE TO THINK ABOUT THE STAR CANOPUS,
SO FAR, SO FAR AWAY.

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(THIS POLITICAL REPORT COVERS BOTH AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER.) END SUMMARY.

1. INTRODUCTION: THERE IS A KIND OF POLITICAL PENDULUM IN FRANCE THAT MOVES SLOWLY AND REGULARLY FROM LEFT TO RIGHT AND BACK AGAIN. FOR THE PAST TWO MONTHS THE PENDULUM HAS BEEN SQUARELY ON THE RIGHT. UNTIL THE CHIRAC PHENOMENON THE LEFT WAS IN FAT CITY, WATCHING ONE

ELEMENT AFTER ANOTHER (LECANUET, THE SANGUINETTI BROTHERS, CNI PRESIDENT MOTTE, ETC.) PEEL OFF THE PRESIDENTIAL SQUADRON AND ZOOM INTO ITS OWN HEAVEN. CHIRAC CAME OUT SLUGGING AND LECANUET'S BOYS STARTED WONDERING IF STOCK IN VGE WAS REALLY WORTH THE DIVIDENDS. THE POLITICAL WORLD WAS SLOWLY GEARING UP FOR THE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT ON OCTOBER 2, AND MONSIEUR AND MADAME DUPONT GOT READY TO TIGHTEN THEIR BELTS AS THE BARRE PLAN WAS ANNOUNCED. STORES CANCELLED THEIR USUAL FALL PROMOTIONS AND DIESEL ENGINES BEGAN TO ENJOY A NEW VOGUE AS THE PRICE OF GAS CLIMBED TO NEARLY TWO DOLLARS A GALLON (AS ELSEWHERE DIESEL FUEL IS MUCH CHEAPER THAN GASOLINE IN FRANCE). BUT THROUGH THICK AND THIN, THE MAJORITY HAD ALL THE ACTION.

2. JACQUES CHIRAC: JACQUES CHIRAC IS HOTTER POLITICAL PROPERTY THAN EVER IN FRANCE. WITH A 1-2-3 PUNCH HE HAS SET HIMSELF UP AS A MENACE NOT ONLY TO GISCARD, BUT TO MITTERRAND. IN EFFECT HIS CROSSING OF THE DESERT TURNED OUT TO BE NO MORE THAN A STROLL OVER ONE DUNE, AND HIS

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AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 04 PARIS 29876

APPEAL FOR A "RASSEMBLEMENT" (MASS MOVEMENT)MADE IN
EGLETONS --(PARIS 29168) HAS GALVANIZED THE UDR OUT OF
A SEMI-TORPOR THAT HAS LASTED SINCE CHIRAC STEPPED DOWN
AS PARTY SECRETARY-GENERAL IN JUNE 1975. ON NOVEMBER
7 CHIRAC WILL RUN AGAINST THE SOCIALIST MARIE-THERESE
EYQUEM IN A LEGISLATIVE BI-ELECTION TO REGAIN HIS NA-
TIONAL ASSEMBLY SEAT. AS IT IS HIS NATIVE CORREZE
DEPARTMENT IN WHICH HE'LL BE CAMPAIGNING, AND AS HIS
LOCAL POPULARITY IS HIGH, THERE IS VIRTUALLY NO CHANCE
OF HIS LOSING. THOUGH SOME CLAIM HIS ASCENSION IS A
SOURCE OF DISUNION IN THE PARTY, THE FACT IS THAT CHI-
RAC CAN REASONABLY COUNT ON THE ENTHUSIASTIC SUPPORT OF
NEARLY THE WHOLE UDR -- A FEW BARONS EXCEPTED. AND
THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER, CAREFULLY SPACING HIS CALLS
AND APPEALS, WILL HOLD THE LIMELIGHT RIGHT UP TO EARLY
DECEMBER, WHEN THE SPECIAL NATIONAL ASSIZES HE HAS
REQUESTED WILL TAKE PLACE IN PARIS. THERE HE CAN
BE EXPECTED TO OUTLINE THE BASE OF A NEW GAULLIST
MOVEMENT AND TO SETTLE INTO CRUISING SPEED UNTIL THE
MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN SPRING 1977.

3. THE BARRE GOVERNMENT: PRIME MINISTER BARRE HAD FOUR WEEKS OF GRACE BEFORE BIG POLITICAL GUNS OPENED UP AT HIM FOR ONE REASON OR ANOTHER (PARIS 25824). HE WASN'T POLITICAL ENOUGH; BEING A "BOURGEOIS" HE COULDN'T, AS FAR AS THE LEFT IS CONCERNED, EFFECT ANY SERIOUS BENEFICIAL CHANGES IN THE STRUCTURES OF GOF; HE WAS BOUND TO CLASH WITH THE PRESIDENT. IN ONE SENSE, HOWEVER, HE UNDERCUT MANY OF HIS CRITICS BY APPOINTING GAULLIST "BARON" OLIVIER GUICHARD HEAD OF A GROUP TO "FIX THE MODALITIES OF COMMON ACTION THAT SHOULD LEAD THE POLITICAL FORMATIONS". ABLY ASSISTED BY ELECTORAL STRATEGIST ANTOINE RUFENACHT, GUICHARD, IT WAS BRIEFLY BELIEVED, COULD LEAD THE MAJORITY OUT OF ITS DOLDRUMS. THAT WAS ON SEPTEMBER 4. ON SEPTEMBER 13 CHIRAC FIRED
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HIS FIRST SALVO (PARIS 26801) AND GUICHARD WAS TOTALLY ECLIPSED. SO FAR, HOWEVER, BARRE IS STILL WIDELY RESPECTED FOR HIS EXPERTISE IN ECONOMICS AND HIS FORTHRIGHTNESS IN DEALING WITH THE FRENCH PEOPLE, AS WELL AS THE TOUGHNESS HE IS BEGINNING TO SHOW BOTH AS A POLITICIAN AND A DEBATOR. COMPARISONS TO THE EARLY POMPIDOU ARE ALREADY BEING MADE.

4. THE PRESIDENT: GISCARD ON THE OTHER HAND IS INCREASINGLY ISOLATED, INCREASINGLY UNDER ATTACK FROM FRIEND AND FOE ALIKE. HIS PRESIDENTIAL CHARTER, TO BE CALLED "THE FRENCH DEMOCRACY", IS DUE FOR PUBLICATION NEXT WEEK, BUT PREDICTIONS ARE THAT IT WILL NOT CAUSE MUCH OF A STIR ON EITHER SIDE OF THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM. IN EARLY SEPTEMBER, TO COUNTER MITTERRAND'S CONCEPT OF A "SOCIOLOGICAL MAJORITY" (OF THE LEFT), GISCARD LAUNCHED THE IDEA OF AN "INSTINCTIVE MAJORITY" ALLIED TO HIS CONCEPTS OF A LIBERAL ADVANCED SOCIETY. THE PRESIDENT'S EFFORT -- ALBEIT MODEST -- HAS FALLEN ON DEAF EARS. AND AS GISCARD BECOMES MORE ALIENATED NOT ONLY FROM BUREAUCRATS AND THE MAJORITY PARTIES, BUT EVEN FROM HIS IMMEDIATE ENTOURAGE, HE GETS AN EVEN WORSE PRESS. "BECAUSE", SAYS ONE LE MONDE JOURNALIST, "GISCARD IS ULTIMATELY MORE ATTACHED TO THE IDEOLOGY OF HIS CLASS THAN EVER WAS DISRAELI, HIS ADMINISTRATION IS ENOUGH TO PUT YOU TO SLEEP STANDING UP". BASICALLY HE JUST DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE THE RIGHT HUMAN TOUCH.

5. THE PLAN: EVERYBODY FOUND SOMETHING TO CRITICIZE IN THE PLAN WHEN IT WAS PRESENTED ON SEPTEMBER 22, BUT IN THE MAJORITY AT LEAST IT WAS CLEAR THAT VIRTUALLY ALL DEPUTIES WOULD VOTE FOR IT. THE UDR IS LOOKING FOR A SECOND PART, WITH MORE STRINGENT TAX MEASURES, AS ARE

THE CENTER PARTIES. THE INDEPENDENT REPUBLICANS SEE THE
PLAN AS MORE OR LESS ON THE MARK, BUT PRAISE STOPPED
THERE. EVEN THAT OLD INFLATION CRUSHER ANTOINE PINAY
DECLARED HE WAS EXPECTING MORE VIGOROUS MEASURES. OF
ALL THE OPPOSITION PARTIES, HOWEVER, THE SOCIALISTS HAVE
BEEN THE LEAST HOSTILE, PERHAPS SENSING THAT -- AS REAL
POWER IS FINALLY WITHIN THEIR GRASP -- THEY DON'T WISH
TO WIN IN 1978 WITH THE ECONOMY IN DEEP TROUBLE. THE
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PLAN'S CHANCES FOR SUCCESS ARE OPEN TO SERIOUS QUESTION
DUE TO THE WEAKENED POLITICAL STATURE OF THE PRESIDENT
AND TO THE FACT THAT HISTORICALLY THE FRENCH PSYCHE IS
UNCOMFORTABLE AT BEST WITH THE KIND OF PROLONGED
EFFORT CALLED FOR IN THE BARRE PLAN. IN EFFECT, MANY
BELIEVE THAT THE PLAN IS GISCARD'S LAST HOPE FOR THE
1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, AND THAT SHOULD IT FAIL,

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AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 04 PARIS 29876

LOSING THESE ELECTIONS IS A FOREGONE CONCLUSION. HENCE
THE IMPORTANCE BARRE HAS ACQUIRED AS A SEPARATE FACTOR
IN THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SITUATION.

6. THE MAJORITY: THERE IS A CERTAIN OVERTONE OF THE
PATHETIC IN READING ONE HEADLINE OF AUGUST 19, ONLY FOUR
DAYS BEFORE CHIRAC'S RESIGNATION. INTRODUCING AN ARTI-
CLE ON A MEETING JUST HELD BETWEEN LECANUET AND CHIRAC,
"AURORE" (CONSERVATIVE) CRIES "PERFECT ACCORD WITH CHIRAC
ON THE FUTURE OF FRANCE". ONE WEEK LATER, AFTER THE
NAMING OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT, LECANUET'S CENTRE DES
DEMOCRATES SOCIAUX IS SCREAMING "TREASON" BECAUSE THEY
DROPPED FROM FOUR MINISTERS TO ONE. THEIR CRIES WENT
UNNOTICED, HOWEVER, AS DID THE IR PARLIAMENTARIANS MEET-
ING AT THE END OF SEPTEMBER, WHILE THE UDR CONFERENCE
AT ROCAMADOUR (PARIS 29340) AND THE REBORN BANNER LEADER
CHIRAC GRABBED ALL THE NEWS.

7. THE QUESTION NOW IS WHITHER THE UDR. NOW AS THEIR

POLITICAL SUN SEEMS TO BE SETTING, THE BARONS MOVE INTO THE BLEACHERS TO WATCH THE NEW SLUGGER. GONE IS ALL TALK OF A UDR SLAUGHTER IN THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS; TAITTINGER IS BACK IN THE RUNNING FOR FIRST MAYOR OF PARIS; AND SUDDENLY THE CATCHWORD "WORKER" IS ON EVERY GAULLIST'S LIPS. AS MOROSITY SETTLES OVER THE INDEPENDENT REPUBLICANS, THERE IS A NEW SENSE OF PURPOSE AND HOPE AMONG THE GAULLISTS. ON CLOSE INSPECTION EVEN SUCH GRUMBLING DEPUTIES AS HECTOR ROLLAND AND ROLAND NUNGESSER ARE SEEN TO BE STEPPING BACK INTO UDR FORMATION AS THE PARTY READIES ITS FRONTAL ATTACK ON THE LEFT BY A COMBINATION OF PROPOSALS THAT INCLUDE, IF WE CAN BELIEVE CHIRAC AT EGLETONS, PROGRESSIVE REFORM ALONG WITH MUSCLED CONSERVATISM. WE CAN EXPECT THE PARTY, UNDER CHIRAC'S TUTELAGE, TO KEEP ON THE PRESSURE THROUGH THE LEGISLATIVES AND BEYOND, HOWEVER THE MAJORITY AS A CONFIDENTIAL

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WHOLE MAY FARE THEREIN.

8. THE LEFT: MEAGER PICKINGS FOR THE LAST TWO MONTHS IN THE OPPOSITION. ASIDE FROM THE WELL-ATTENDED FETE DE L'HUMANITE IN MID-SEPTEMBER (PARIS 26806), AND A TIFF OVER WHETHER OR NOT THE LEFT WOULD HAVE SINGLE LISTS IN CERTAIN CITIES FOR THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS (PARIS 27228), THE BIGGEST EVENT ON THE LEFT SEEMS TO BE THE PUBLICATION OF JEAN ELLEINSTEIN'S CONTROVERSIAL STUDY OF FRENCH COMMUNISM. ON AUGUST 17, ROBERT FABRE, PRESIDENT OF THE LEFT RADICALS (THE THIRD FACTOR IN THE UNITED LEFT), ASKED FOR AN UPDATING OF THE COMMON PROGRAM THAT WOULD TAKE ACCOUNT OF LEFT RADICAL POLICIES, BUT THERE IS LITTLE CHANCE THAT SUCH WILL TAKE PLACE IN THE NEAR FUTURE (LEFT RADICALS PLAYED NO ROLE IN THE DRAFTING OF THE COMMON PROGRAM). EVEN BEFORE CHIRAC'S ASSAULT PCF LEADER MARCHAIS WAS WARNING THE LEFT NOT TO BE SEDUCED BY FLIRTATIONS FROM THE MAJORITY. THE P.S. IN ITS TURN PROPOSED A PROJECT FOR OVERHAULING THE FRENCH SCHOOL SYSTEM, WHICH INCLUDES INCREASED CREDITS FOR TRADE SCHOOLS AND TAILORING HIGHER EDUCATION MORE TO THE NEEDS OF THE COUNTRY. BUT IF FOR THE TIME BEING ALL'S QUIET ON THE LEFT FRONT, AS SURE AS GRITS ARE GROCERIES WE CAN EXPECT THE LEFT TO BLOW UP OVER SOMETHING OR OTHER IN THE MONTHS TO COME.

9. POLLS: PRIME MINISTER BARRE AND EVER POPULAR MINISTER OF HEALTH SIMONE VEIL ARE THE ONLY PEOPLE SMILING. AN IFOP - LE POINT POLL OF SEPTEMBER 13 SHOWS FULLY 40 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE BELIEVING BARRE HAS A BETTER CHANCE OF SUCCEEDING IN HIS FIGHT AGAINST INFLATION THAN CHIRAC (AGAINST 11 PERCENT WHO THINK HE

WON'T AND 49 PERCENT WITH NO OPINION). AN AUORE
PUBLIMETRIE POLL GIVES THE OLD 52 PERCENT FOR THE LEFT -
48 PERCENT FOR THE MAJORITY SHOULD LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS
BE HELD NOW, WITH THE UDR HOLDING STEADY 15 PERCENT OF
THE FULL ELECTORATE, THE PCF DOWN TO 17 PERCENT, THE
RI AT 25 PERCENT AND THE P.S. AT 33 PERCENT. FINALLY
ANOTHER POLL SHOWED VGE'S POPULARITY DOWN TO AN ALL
TIME LOW OF 47 PERCENT (FROM A PREVIOUS LOW OF 48 PER-
CENT DURING THE NOVEMBER 1974 OIL CRISIS). THE DAY
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POLLS BRING GOOD NEWS TO THE MAJORITY IS STILL IN THE
INDISCERNABLE FUTURE.

10. MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS: FROM THE LIKELIHOOD THREE
ONTHS AGO THAT R.I. PRESIDENT JACQUES DOMINATI WOULD
BE THE ONLY SERIOUS CONTENDER FOR FIRST

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AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

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MAYOR OF PARIS, THERE NOW EXIST FOUR CANDIDATES -- STATE SECRETARY TAITTINGER, DEPUTY DE LA MALENE, RENE GALY-DEJEAN RUNNING ON MICHEL JOBERT'S MOUVEMENT DES DEMOCRATES TICKET, AND DOMINATI HIMSELF. MEANWHILE THE BATTLE FOR LILLE TOOK A NASTY TURN FOR MAJORITY CANDIDATE NORBERT SEGARD (STATE SECRETARY FOR POST OFFICES AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS) WHEN CURRENT MAYOR PIERRE MAUROY (PS) ANNOUNCED THE INCLUSION IN GREATER LILLE -- AND THUS THE CIRCUMSCRIPTION OF TOWN HALL -- OF A HEAVILY LEFT SUBURB CALLED HELLEMMES. SEGARD LOST NO TIME IN DENOUNCING THE LEFT'S GERRYMANDERING, BUT PRESENTED WITH THE ACCOMPLISHED FACT THERE WAS LITTLE HE COULD DO. THUS AN IMPORTANT CITY THAT COULD WELL HAVE FALLEN TO THE MAJORITY IS PROBABLY LOST IN ADVANCE.

11. MISCELLANEOUS: THE SIGNING IN BRUSSELS ON SEPTEMBER 20 OF AN AGREEMENT CONCERNING THE ELECTION OF A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT THROUGH UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE MAY HAVE BEEN A SOURCE OF SATISFACTION TO SOME, BUT IT PROMISES

TO SPLIT MORE THAN ONE PARTY DOWN THE MIDDLE, MOST NOTABLY THE SOCIALISTS AND THE UDR. MONSEIGNEUR LEFEVRE CONTINUES TO MAKE SOME NEWS BY RECEIVING PUBLIC CONDEMNATION FOR HIS RIGHT-WING POLICIES BY SEVERAL LEFT-LEANING CATHOLIC MOVEMENTS. CORSICA HAS CALMED DOWN WITH THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT FOREIGN LEGION RECRUITS WILL BE MOVED OUT (PARIS 28546) BUT AUTONOMIST MILITANTS ARE ONLY WAITING FOR ANOTHER OCCASION TO RALLY ISLANDERS TO THEIR CAUSE. FINALLY, THE INDUSTRIALIST MARCEL DASSAULT'S CHIEF ACCOUNTANT DISAPPEARED WITH OVER 1 1/2 MILLION DOLLARS; AND BEFORE THE AFFAIR DIED DOWN -- WITH THE ACCOUNTANT'S VOLUNTARY RETURN TO FRANCE -- DASSAULT, CHIRAC, A MERCENARY, ASSORTED TROLLOPS AND THE INTEGRITY OF THE UDR WERE ALL INVOLVED.

12. CONCLUSION: THE PRODIGIOUS REENTRY OF CHIRAC ONTO
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THE POLITICAL SCENE WAS EXPECTED, BUT HARDLY SO SOON. MANY BELIEVE THAT EVERY ACTION HE TAKES MUST BE INTERPRETED IN LIGHT OF HIS PERSONAL AMBITIONS AND HIS REMARKABLY SENSITIVE POLITICAL NOSE. AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED (PARIS 28786), THE FACT THAT CHIRAC REPRESENTS A PRESIDENTIAL ALTERNATIVE ON THE RIGHT IS NOT UNWELCOME. TO THE EXTENT THAT THE FRENCH ELECTORATE TURNS AWAY FROM ITS CURRENT LEADERSHIP BETWEEN NOW AND 1978, IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT THERE BE ADDITIONAL ALTERNATIVES BESIDES FRANCOIS MITTERRAND. IN ADDITION, CHIRAC SEEMS TO BE THE ONLY POLITICIAN AVAILABLE WHO HAS A CHANCE OF REVITALIZING AND RESHAPING THE GAULLIST PARTY IN THE ESSENTIAL EFFORT TO CHALLENGE THE SOCIALISTS AS THE LEADING PARTY OF FRANCE.

13. MAJORITY ELECTORAL STRATEGY FOR 1978 IS TWOFOLD: GISCARD WILL ATTEMPT TO WOO THE MODERATE LEFT ELECTORATE; CHIRAC WILL MEET THE LEFT HEAD ON (THOUGH AS MENTIONED ABOVE HIS POLICIES COMPRISE A CERTAIN ELEMENT OF SEDUCTION ALSO). FOR THE MOMENT IT APPEARS THAT THESE TWO TACTICS CAN EXIST SIDE BY SIDE. AFTER THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, HOWEVER, COMPATIBILITY MAY UNDERGO SOME STRAINS -- UNLESS THE MAJORITY WERE TO LOSE LESS BADLY THAN IS CURRENTLY ANTICIPATED. MEANWHILE EVERYONE'S EYE IS AT ONCE ON THE ECONOMIC BAROMETER AND THE PRICE INDEX -- AND WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS DEPEND MORE ON THE STATE OF THE AVERAGE FRENCHMAN'S POCKETBOOK THAN ANYTHING ELSE. GISCARD MUST BE HOPING THAT THE GRACEFUL LADY FARMER ON THE HEAD OF A ONE-FRANC PIECE IS NOT SOWING DISCORD.
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